

Jewish Ethics

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

I am a great fan of the Business Ethics Centre of Jerusalem (www.besr.org). Firstly because it was founded by a man I greatly admire and respect, Dr. Meir Tamari. Secondly because a former pupil of mine, one of the best, Rabbi Pinchas Rosenstein, is involved, and thirdly because of articles like this one by Rabbi Joel Domb on the treatment of foreign workers that appears on its web site and weekly distribution list. Here is an extract:

Economic exploitation of the weak and unprotected sectors of society is unfortunately a common problem in Israel. Especially at risk are the thousands of foreign workers who are brought here by contractors looking for quick profits from their unsuspecting workers. In many cases these employers confiscate the workers' passports, thus shutting off their ability to escape, and then provide them with very poor working conditions and minimal pay by any standard. What we have here is effectively an illicit slave trade, with the authorities turning a blind eye due to the economic benefits which can accrue from these workers.

This situation is both socially untenable and morally unconscionable. There is no justification for such abuse of the basic human right to freedom, and the social implications could be disastrous for Israel's image as a country which is dedicated to upholding the dignity of every resident. The fact that these workers are gentiles does not permit us to take advantage of them. Our own history has taught us how hard it is to be a stranger in a foreign land, and we should therefore be extra sensitive to people who are far away from their families and homelands. . .

. . . These workers are both friends of Israel and are helping to build up the country. Many of them even risk their lives in their jobs, as was proven a few weeks ago when two Romanian workers were killed while building a fence in the Gaza Strip. Surely we should treat them at least as well as any other workers!

The article was of course written in and for Israel, but in the light of recent scandals it is clearly just as appropriate for the USA. If you care about genuine Jewish values, support these guys. They're good!